

Conclusion. After the appearance of the 1971 Document, Seltzer wrote a letter to the New England Journal of Medicine (288: 1186, 1973).

SMOKING AND CORONARY HEART DISEASE

To the Editor: In many, but not all, countries, cigarette smokers have been found to have higher rates of coronary heart disease than nonsmokers.¹ Even though dose-response relations and data on former cigarette smokers show a number of inconsistencies,^{2,3} cigarettes have been accepted by the Public Health Service as "one of the major risk factors contributing to the development of . . . [coronary heart disease]."⁴

One of the particular strengths cited in governmental statements on cigarettes and lung cancer has been the interpretation of secular changes in lung-cancer mortality among British doctors, likening it to "that of a controlled cessation experiment."⁵ As shown in Table 1,⁶ mortality from this cause decreased by 25 per cent over a 12-year period in which the prevalence of cigarette smokers in the same population decreased by close to 50 per cent.

Table 1. Mortality from Lung Cancer and Coronary Heart Disease (CHD) among British Doctors 35 to 84 Years of Age.⁶

PREVALENCE OF CIGARETTE SMOKERS		AGE-STANDARDIZED MORTALITY (RATES/1000/YR)		
yr	%	period	lung cancer	CHD
1951	41.3	1953-57	1.10	5.19
1957	32.9	1957-61	0.85	5.64
1966	21.3	1961-65	0.83	5.59
		% change		
		1st-2d period	-23	+9
		2d-3d period	-2	-1
		1st-3d period	-25	+8

Now, if cigarette smoking were indeed clearly linked to coronary heart disease, by the same logic one would have expected to find a decrement in mortality from this cause over this period also. But inspection of these data (Table 1) reveals that, instead of decreasing, mortality actually increased by some 8 per cent.

Thus, the type of epidemiologic observations that provided the basis for the statement, "the reduction of rates experience in ex-smokers . . . is clearly shown in the case of lung cancer to be a reflection of significant change in risk,"⁷ lends no support to the current enthusiasm for cigarette smoking as a major risk factor in coronary heart disease.

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